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Notes
on a rare form of
Skin Disease.

During the years 1881-82-83, while residing in Yagueta, South America, my attention was directed to a form of skin disease, quite unlike any other I had ever seen and which I believe is confined to limited parts of meridional America.

The disease is confined to those residing in the deep valleys of the country and attacks, without exception, all those

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races Caucasian, American
and Ethiopian, with their
crosses, and if more natives
are attacked, it is by reason
of their greater number, in
relation to the others, and
because of their more filthy
habits. It spares neither
age nor sex.

It may be defined
as a morbid condition of
the skin, endemic in cer-
tain limited parts of the
American continent, char-
acterized by changes in
the colour of the skin, and
always attended by great
itching. It is probably of
parasitical origin.

It passes under a

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variety of names, in fact, almost every province has its own distinguishing one. The most common is Cuto, by which name it was known in the province where I was located, it is also known as Mal del pinto, the sufferers being known as Pintos. The Germans call it Karata-fleck.

There are several varieties of the disease, named according to the colour they present, red, white or blue.

The form I am acquainted with is the blue, which is prevalent in the province of Yaracuy

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where I resided, The other forms are rare.

In persons of white skin, the blue form of the disease appears as a pale or yellowish discolouration, generally first noticed on the dorsum of the hands, spreading to the arms and face, where it first appears on the forehead and other projecting parts, the maxillary eminences, the tips of the nose and chin.

The colour is difficult to describe, but is marked and very distinct from the normal.

If the person is dark-skinned, a negro or a

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mullato, the discolouration
is grey, more or less marked
and first appears on the
dorsum of the fingers, over
the articulations, thence it
spreads as in the white
races.

During this period
of the disease, the person
may be in a state of com-
plete health, in some cases
slight itching of the dis-
coloured part is present.

The duration of
this period is very variable,
but usually long, the dis-
colouration does not at
any time remain station-
ary, but follows constantly
an invasive, but slow march.

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After a variable time, on those parts which first became discoloured, numerous, blue spots appear, like the marks left by half-burnt grains of gunpowder. When imbedded in the skin, these spots are constant and cannot be effaced by pressure, their circumference is regular, and the transition into healthy skin abrupt and without border.

The healthy skin is soft and flexible, but the diseased parts feel thicker and harder, as if grains of coarse sand lay underneath the skin.

Sensibility of the

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diseased skin is diminished.

These groups of marks become confluent and completely cover the discoloured part, and as it progresses until it covers the entire body, except the soles of the feet and palms of the hands, it seldom attacks the hairy parts.

In some cases the disease becomes arrested at this stage, but more frequently the blue places become lustrous and polished as if the parts had been anointed with mercurial ointment. This lustrous appearance of the blue patches would appear to

be due to an excessive secretion of the sebaceous material.

This stage of the disease does not present any differences in the various races, except that it is more obvious in a white man than in a negro.

As the disease progresses a burning, stinging, itching sensation is experienced in the parts attacked, and the hairs of the affected places become thin attenuated and stand erect, they soon begin to fall off and with all the more rapidity because of the excessive rubbing and

scratching to which they⁹
are subjected.

After this condition
has existed for a time
scaling of the part becomes
abundant, this phenomenon
of scaling is generally, lim-
ited to the discoloured parts,
although it sometimes
passes on to the pigmented
portions of skin. On their
removal here the skin
still presents a blue
appearance. The scaly
spots generally assume cir-
cular forms which radiate
from a centre to invade
with their circumference
fresh parts.

The patient complains

10.
of pains in the arms and
legs, increasing at night,
these and the intolerant
itching soon affect the
persons health.

As the disease
progresses, the itching con-
tinues to be very intense,
and is almost insupportable.

The sick person
gives off a very peculiar
odour, which has been
remarked as very similar
to that given off by a dog
suffering from red mange,
persistent, disagreeable
and intolerant, and so
great is it that the sufferer's
own digestive functions
are disordered by the

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disgust which it causes
him.

Many cases go on
to ulceration, and foul
bad smelling ulcers form.
The ulceration would appear
not to be caused by the dis-
-ease but to be due to the
scratchings of the sick
person, who in his desper-
-ation will often use rough
pieces of bark or rough
stones. In those who have
sufficient strength of
mind not to scratch,
crusts form and fall off.

A slight feeling
of fatigue which has been
felt since the beginning
of the disease increases,

12.
the patient becomes thin,
the appetite fails, there is
great sleeplessness, the
patient now takes to his
bed, and unless relieved
quickly sinks from exhaus-
tion.

Many of the cases I
have seen have reached
this stage, when the person
is driven to seek the advice
of some one other than the
native "curanderos".

The duration of
these phenomena is indefinite
some cases seem to run a
more rapid course than
others, but all progress
slowly. One pinto, aged
seventy, on whom the blue

blue mottling had spread but little, had had it as long as he could remember.

With respect to the hairy parts, I have mentioned that these are seldom attacked, this would appear to be due to the protection the hair affords from the light. In many cases where the disease attacks the face and spreads upwards, its march is arrested by the fringe of hair which falls over the forehead, as is the fashion in Yucucella. This seems to be an indication that the disease requires the presence of light for its development and growth.

When the patient's occupations oblige them to wet themselves frequently, as in the case of cultivators of maize, turners, boatmen and fishermen, the parts which are most frequently wet are the parts which are most liable to be attacked by the disease.

Some cases run a different course to the one already indicated, after passing through a period of scaling and itching, which usually lasts a few days, the symptoms abate, but only to return with fresh force after a variable time. If he employs no judicious

treatment, there is no doubt of the disease returning.

The remission is generally in the dry season and returns at the approach of the rains.

The ulcerations may last for a long time, even after treatment which is followed by the disappearance of all the other signs and symptoms.

Another of the sequelae which follow the disease and which continues indefinitely, is induration of the skin. This induration gives the "pintos" a characteristic appearance, the wrinkles especially around the eyes.

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become very much exaggerated.

The nails do not seem to suffer, at least, I have not met with a case where they seemed to undergo any change.

The cicatrices left by the healing of the ulcers are usually deep and irregular.

Temperature, climate and soil may be regarded as predisposing, if not exciting causes. That these are operative is proved by the fact, that the disease is endemic in certain localities, having a certain topographical

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similarity, namely, hot,
moist districts at the
bottom of deep valleys,
almost enclosed by moun-
tains.

That race is not
a specific cause, is seen
from the prevalence of
the disease among members
of both white and coloured
races.

Habits and occupa-
tion play a most important
part in the causation of
this disease. It is a well
known fact that the dis-
ease is more common
among the poor and filthy
than among the well-to-do
and clean.

Syphilis and scrofula are looked upon by the natives as exciting causes, in fact, syphilis is said to be the entire cause of it by many. Both, however, may be looked on as predisposing causes simply from the debility they induce.

Whether the disease is hereditary or not, I am unable to say, the general opinion among the inhabitants is that it is hereditary. I have heard that children have been born showing unmistakable signs of the disease, but this I doubt very much. It is a fact, however, that many

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children, sons of fathers,
who have Cuto, not born in
districts, where the disease
prevails, suffer from it.

In the inhabitants
of the infected regions, it
often makes its appearance,
between the ages of four
and six, an indication,
in my opinion, in favour
of its contagious nature,
but against that of it
being hereditary.

The predisposition
to the disease may be
hereditary, but only in a
general sense, due to the
debility and mal-nutrition
of the parents begetting the
children.

The disease is contagious, no one disputes this, and there are numerous proofs of its contagious nature.

In the first place, there is the fact, that the emigration of a person suffering from Cuto, to a place, favouring the development of the disease, but where it has not previously existed, is followed by the propagation of the disease. I have also seen sufferers, who attributed their infirmity, to their intimate contact with persons who had the disease. Report mentions cases where a healthy person has been inoculated in an in-

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voluntary manner, by being wounded by the same instrument which had just wounded a person suffering from Buté.

I imagine the disease is most violent in its sear and ulcerative stages.

Among the inhabitants of the valleys where this disease is endemic, it is regarded as incurable, but this fact does not prevent the natives employing numerous plants, mostly of unknown physiological action in its treatment. Among the favourite plants, is one called "Cadillo de perro", an infusion of which is employ-

-ed, but so far as I have noticed, without any good effect. Its action seems to be chiefly diuretic.

The apparent incurability of the disease, is due to the negligent and filthy habits of the people, who look with contempt on a disease which permits them a long life, and to the certainty of the relapse so long as the person is exposed to the causes which predispose its appearance.

The first step in the treatment is to remove the person from the habitat of the disease, to the coast, if possible, or to a locality

where it is unknown.

Then the exhibition of mercury internally, or externally in the form of ointment or fumigations.

Of the preparations of mercury, the one which gives the best results is Calomel, especially when combined with Iodide of Potassium.

The mercury may be administered by friction.

Many among the common people, especially Italians, use a mixture of mercurial ointment, lead and sulphur.

Others use a mixture of metallic mercury, spirit of

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two punctures and lood, with
good results.

I have also used the red
oxide of mercury with mark-
ed benefit and baths of
corrosive sublimate are
useful.

Besides the preparation
of mercury, the salts of copper,
sulphur, iodine sublimated
and vesicant plants are also
used. Sassaaparilla, the
pomacea of the Tenequelanos
is much used and is credited
with some cures.

In the majority of
cases arsenic and cod-liver
oil are useful.

During the exhibition
of the medicine, the patient

should observe the greatest cleanliness, bathing daily in hot water, and changing linen more frequently than is the case among the natives of Venezuela.

The beneficial effects of the mercurial treatment are often seen during the first week of its use, by the cessation of the itching.

The disease is very liable to return, but quickly falls to the same treatment, which has a good influence on the disease in all its stages, and if treated sufficiently early, before ulceration has been induced, no mark or stain is left to tell of the

patients past sufferings.

The following is the treatment I used and can recommend, small doses of calomel, avoiding salivation but pushed till there is slight soreness of the gums.

followed by increasing doses of iodide of potassium until visible effects are produced. The following parasiticide should be used at the same time, sponging the diseased parts with it several times a day.

R. Hyd: perchlor. gr. xv
Glycerini ℥j
Aq. ad ℥vj

Fr. lot.

Solve.

The prophylactic

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treatment may be summed up in one word, Sanitation. Of the many filthy races on the face of the earth, I am sure the half-breed (Indian and Spanish) natives of Yucucula are the filthiest.

The houses are made of wattlework, into the interstices of which clay is worked so as to form a solid mass and which quickly dries in the sun, the roof is composed of thatch of palm leaves.

These cabins are of the smallest dimensions and the majority are without a window or any other means of ventilation.

This serves as the sleeping
 place of a man, his wife,
 and often a numerous
 family, half a dozen dogs
 and as many pigs, and
 occasionally the ubiquitous
 donkey is to be found dom-
 -iciled under the same
 roof. The nearest bush
 serves as the family closet
 and all micturate on the
 clay floor. In front of
 the low door is a hole, form-
 -ed by the wallowings of the
 pigs, into which all the
 offal and garbage of the
 household is thrown.
 This after every shower
 becomes a seething putrid
 mass of filth, which is

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constantly stirred up by the
pigs, and on passing which
a European is obliged to
give spurs to his horse and
apply his handkerchief to
his nose.

It will be apparent
that this filthy mode of living
must have an immense effect
in propagating and spread-
ing the disease, and the con-
version of the people from
these filthy ways will be
the first step in a prophyl-
actic treatment.

Regulation of the
rivers so as to obtain a
drier climate might fol-
low the removal of the
dense forest from the

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valley slopes, and good natural drainage might be obtained by planting clumps of Australian blue gum trees, which are rapid in growth and easy of acclimation.

It would be prudent even to change the sites of the villages to a higher level. At present they are situated as near the rivers as they possibly can, because of the ease with which water is to be obtained, this might be obviated by sinking wells on the hill side.

To improve the social condition of the

natives, lucrative employment ought to be provided for them, this would do much to raise them from the misery in which they live, the improving of their condition, would, without doubt, create in them habits of cleanliness and they would then understand the benefits of accepting a civilized mode of living. By these means, also, they would learn the use of appropriate clothing, which would protect them from the solar rays, which, I am convinced, favours the development of this disease, they would be enabled to procure better and more

wholesome food, which would recruit their strength and enable them to resist the advances of the disease.

They would also be in a position to provide themselves with larger, better arranged and better ventilated dwellings and so prevent the herding together which takes place.

The diet of these people consists in great part of maize, which is, oftener than not, infected with a fungus, this poisoning from the effects of similarly diseased cereals may play an important part in the causation of

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the disease. I would enact
the disease of all diseased
maize, order its destruction,
and either procure a
supply of fresh seed or
make an attempt to grow
other food stuffs.

By measures of
this kind and by others not
mentioned, but which may
easily be deduced, and by
following up the treatment
which I have indicated,
this loathsome disease
might be combated, and
hundreds who at present
are looked on with terror
and repugnance, and who
are living in a state of
complete isolation, in Ascleon

de Lepros" and elsewhere,
be relieved from their suffer-
ings and enabled to enjoy
again the society of their
fellow creatures.

Regarding the literature
of this disease, very little
seems to have been written
on it. In the British Med-
ical Journal of 4th Nov. 1882,
there appears a short
account of the disease, ex-
tracted from a Mexican
Journal.

Mr. Dimean of the Faculty
of Physicians and Surgeons
Glasgow, has kindly searched
many volumes for me, with
the result of only finding
one reference to it, in one

of Alibert's works, Sir,
however, I have been unable
to see.

I hereby certify that the
foregoing "Notes on a rare
form of skin disease," have
been composed by me, and
are the results of original
observation.

Alexander Macindoe.